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RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2870
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SENSITIVE
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DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: RAJAPAKSA GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT BASE
REMAINS SOLID

REF: COLOMBO 539

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Despite economic troubles and democratic
lapses, President Rajapaksa continues to enjoy popular
support among the Sinhalese majority, even as opinions differ
radically among the minority communities. Minister of
Environment Ranawaka reflected GSL's approach to the conflict
in a July 12 op-ed that argued the LTTE could be defeated
decisively. The government's war strategy prioritizes the
destruction of the LTTE both militarily and politically while
at the same time characterizing civil society and
international criticism as giving support to the Tigers. End
summary.

¶2. (U) Minister of Environment and Natural Resources Patali
Champika Ranawaka, a member of the extreme nationalist JHU
party, reflected the GSL,s war mentality in a July 12 op-ed
titled "The War Is Winnable". In the column, Ranawaka denies
the ethnic origins of the conflict, instead arguing that the
LTTE developed as a proxy force of India and a few Western
nations. He asserts that the GSL's number one priority
should be to "prevent international military or political
intervention." This claim is consistent with the GSL's
recent demonizing of international organizations and foreign
governments for trying to "stop the war against terrorism."
Both are accused of becoming extensions of the LTTE in a
battlefield where attacks occur not only militarily but also
in the form of allegations of human rights abuses, protests
against media censorship, union strikes, and the tarnishing
of Sri Lanka,s image in international forums.

¶3. (U) Deep divisions remain between the ethnic communities'
perceptions of the conflict. A nationwide poll released by
the Centre for Police Alternatives (CPA) in June illustrates
the continuing popular support enjoyed by President Rajapaksa
within the Sinhalese community despite the rising cost of
living and a rollback of democratic norms. Only 11% of
Sinhalese (versus just over 50% of Tamils) consider abuse of
human rights by the police or the armed forces very
significant. Additionally, the poll found that 56% of Tamils
feel that discrimination since independence has been a "very
significant" problem while only 12% of Sinhalese agree.

These polling results are consistent with previous CPA polls
(ref A).

¶4. (SBU) COMMENT: The GSL's goal has been to depict the LTTE
as an extremist renegade force) one that could be wiped out
permanently - rather than deriving the limited support it has
from a segment of the population that fears and distrusts the
central government. The GSL's promotion of the LTTE splinter
group TMVP in the East helps make their case that the LTTE is
not the sole representative of the Tamil population.
However, TMVP's assumption of political power in the East
will only serve to draw support as a viable alternative to
the LTTE if it can improve the daily lives of the Eastern
population and receive significant powers devolved from
Colombo. Devolution, when linked with "federalism," however
remains deeply unpopular with the CPA poll finding 77% of
Sinhalese oppose making Sri Lanka a federal state. This
reflects the drumbeat of criticism of devolution by
ideologues such as Ranawaka. Should the President and his
team decide to pursue devolution with sincerity and make
their case publicly, we are confident he could reverse these
poll numbers. End comment.
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